Plato's *Republic*

Book III

Justification for Lying by Rulers

- Socrates says here (389b-d) that lying is "useful to human beings as a sort of *remedy"* and *thus must be assigned to "doctors," i.e.,* ***rulers***[1] (again, the craft analogy). He goes on to say that "it is appropriate for rulers, *if for anyone at all*, to *lie* ***for the benefit of the city***[2] *in cases involving enemies* ***or citizens***, *while [others] must not put their hands to anything of the sort*." Lying is a *technē (*art/craft) of ruling to reform culture, promote virtue, & ***reveal a simulacrum of truth***[3]*.*
- The "purge" (399e) of unacceptable content and style from tales, speeches, music, and even standard crafts (401c) is a form of this lying (here as *censorship*, a cultural emetic) that prepares the way for stronger forms, including *at least* the following three (**plus** the Myth of the Cave [VII]):
  1. *the Myth of Metals or "Noble Lie"* (414c-) (described next)
  2. *the false lottery for guardian mating* (V: 459e-) [cf. genetic lottery]
  3. *the Myth of Er* (X: 614b-)

The Noble Lie (414c-415d)

- It is certainly one of the more controversial parts of the *Republic*. (Popper considered it an apology for racism.) The "noble" adjective, as Allan Bloom's notes indicate, suggests that it is something of *elite* origin and use as well as being "for the benefit of the city." (389c)
- Socrates begins by saying that "I'll attempt to persuade first the rulers and the soldiers, then the rest of the city, that the rearing and education we gave them were like *dreams*; they only *thought* they were undergoing what was happening to them…." As Jonathan Lear suggests, the Noble Lie is *a Myth to displace all our other myths:* it defangs those "bad" myths learned in childhood (e.g., Cephalus' death fears [330e]) by making them all seem to be part of a grand illusion.

- The Myth itself has us being reared in the earth, brothers of the earth, with our souls being admixtures of different quality *metals* (gold, silver, bronze, iron). Those with the former two are fit for being *guardians or auxiliaries*, those with the latter two, craftsmen or farmers, respectively.
- The Myth provides a justification for **meritocracy:** those selected for the higher ranks can be *thought* to have the requisite metals in their souls, though in reality they are selected according to their *fitness for service*. **(Mobility!)**
- The Myth can be seen as an *antidote* to strong family or ethnic ties: we are *all* brothers of the earth; the presence of precious metals in our souls *cuts across both familial and ethnic lines* (415c). As Socrates notes near the end (415d), this Myth will plainly be a false ideology to the initial generation, but it will gain strength through its repetition across generations, like many

Community of Property (415d-417b)

- The guardians will have no private property and will not be allowed to own precious metals, for they have these already in their souls (the Noble Lie). Instead, they will live communally, be paid a wage by other citizens, eat at “common mess,” etc. *Two* controversies often arise here:
- **First**, interpreters sometimes say that the community of property extends to *all* citizens (e.g., Aristotle’s *Politics*, Book II, Section A, Chapters 1 and 5), but this is clearly contradicted by the text. Socrates says that “for them [the guardians] *alone* of those in the city” are precious metals forbidden, and he also says that “whenever they [the guardians] will possess private land, houses, and currency, they’ll be *householders and farmers instead of guardians*,” implying that members of the producer class *are*

- **Second**, scholars disagree about whether *non*guardian women are socially equal to men. For example, Susan Okin says no and C.D.C. Reeve says yes:
- Okin maintains that the passage just cited—referring to private land, houses, and currency—would be assumed by the interlocutors to include *wives* and that the style of argumentation at the beginning of Book V suggests that *private wives* are the default option, overcome only when communalism is mandated, as it is in the guardian class (see IV: 424a and V: 449c in particular).
- C.D.C. Reeve disagrees, arguing that women are never *explicitly* excluded from other occupations and that there are hints of wider roles (e.g., V: 454d-e, 455d-e).
- I lean towards Okin's interpretation, though, as Reeve's rejoinders are open to the obvious

Guardian Education *(Paideia)*

- **Music:** It has a political *and* an educational purpose. In order to mould guardians, it should have two modes, "a violent one and a voluntary one," i.e., a mode that stirs up *courage* for warlike deeds (e.g., patriotic tunes and marches) and a mode that encourages *moderation* and self-restraint (e.g., Baroque music). (As for the "dogs" of 375e, there will be both an "attack" and a "heel" mode.) The ultimate goal of musical training is to impart rhythm and harmony—in short, *gracefulness*—to the soul, which will affect dancing, speech, sex, etc. (401e-403c)
- **Gymnastics:** Its goal is *bodily health*, and it has two ***effects***: *legal* & *medical*. A Spartan regimen is advised; simplicity is to be preferred to refinement (404d-e). This implies several things about the legal & medical realms:
- *First*, it suggests that *self-mastery* will reduce the

- *Second*, it suggests that *medical intervention* should be minimal and applied only when recovery is likely, for as Socrates says, care is *in*appropriate “for the man who’s not able to live in his established round [work], on the grounds that he’s no profit to himself *or* the city.” (407e)
- He sums all this up by answering in the affirmative to the question “Will you set down a law in the city providing as well for an art of *medicine* such as we described along with such an art of *judging*, which will care for those of your citizens who have good natures in body and soul; while as for those who have not, *they let die the ones whose bodies are such, and the ones whose souls have bad natures and are incurable, they themselves will kill?*”
- **Music and Gymnastics in Harmony for the Sake of the Soul (*psuchē*):** An absence of the former leads to *harshness* (a lack of moderation) while the absence of the latter leads to *softness* (a lack of both resolution and courage). The two must be ***balanced*** in the soul, so that a guardian

The Selection of Rulers

- Potential rulers must be tested to see whether they possess this balance, a corresponding love of the city, and a memory that is hard to deceive (cf. guard dog at 376c).
- Various *competitions* will confront them with fear and tempt them with desire in order to see who has the needed qualities. *(cf. Sparta)*
- *Guardians* are separated from *auxiliaries* here, with the latter providing aid to the former, though their separation will slowly evolve into a different distinction: that between *philosopher kings* and *guardian soldiers* (414b-c) (with this evolution